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An Essay on the Bilious Fever as it has presented itself within the last three or four years in a Southeastern district of Virginia.

By

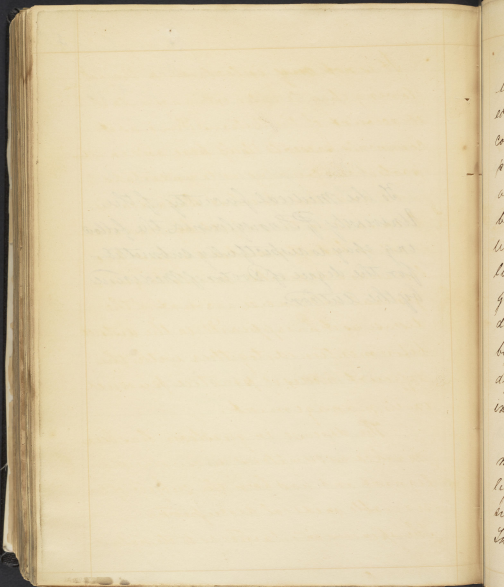
William Briggs  
of  
Virginia

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The 1st day of the 1st  
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William Lloyd  
Virginia

To the Medical faculty of the  
University of Pennsylvania the follow-  
ing essay is respectfully submitted  
for the degree of Doctor of Medicine  
by the Author.





It is not ~~my~~ intention in the following essay to enter into any detail or account of the Bilious Fever, as it commonly presents itself here and in other parts of our country, or to undertake to add any thing to what has already been said on the subject by medical writers: but after making a few preliminary remarks, merely to give a general and concise account of the disease as it has appeared in the district before mentioned, together with the different modes of practice pursued in its management.

The disease in question has been marked by symptoms unusually malignant and has been the subject of considerable medical discussion.

The opinions entertained as to its nature

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have been very diversified, and consequently different modes of practice advocated.

The disease under consideration is evidently only a variety of the ordinary bilious fever of our climate, to which have been superadded symptoms of a much more formidable character, corresponding in its general characteristics, with the cold cases of yellow fever, described by our distinguished countryman Dr. Kuster also ~~with~~ the yellow fever of St. Louis described by Dr. Cartwright of that place under the descriptive character of the ataxic form of fever, and with the typhus totirodes of the West Indies. It also bears some resemblance to the congestive form of fever, treated of by Dr. Armstrong in his very able work on Typhus fever.

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Previously to entering on the immediate history of this disease, I would observe, that the weather within the last three or four years, has been intensely warm, during the summer and autumnal months, particularly during the last year, when the disease prevailed so much more generally, than at any time previously.

There was also an unusual quantity of rain during the winter and spring months of the same year. — It may be well to remark also that the section of country, in which this peculiar form of disease prevails, is low and abounds in miasmatic situations, such as swamps, millponds &c. —

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In the commencement the disease assumes the symptoms which characterise the common bilious fever, with some modification.

It is ushered in with a chill, which is followed by considerable fever, accompanied by sick stomach, headache &c.

The pulse is frequent though not peppy is of the same degree of strength and fullness as in ordinary bilious cases.

The tongue is furred with a white appearance.

In the course of four, two or three days and sometimes later after the complaint discovers itself, symptoms of a more formidable character supervene. — Evident symptoms of prostration come on rapidly, the extremities become cold, without any sense of a chill on the part of the patient

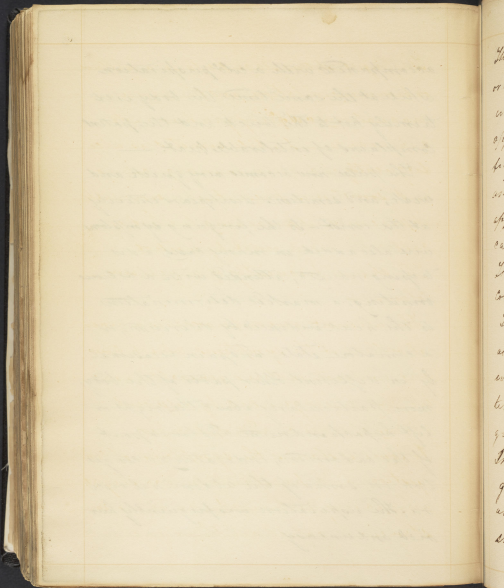
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accompanied with a cold perspiration while at the same time the body is extremely hot to the touch, and the patient complains of intolerable heat. —

The pulse now becomes very quick and weak, and sometimes disappears entirely at the wrist. — To the foregoing symptoms were also added in many cases, a distressing nausea, attended with a bilious vomiting, a marked determination to the head evidenced by delirium, or a comatose state, and pain occasional by in different other parts of the body, more particularly about the right or left hypochondrium and lower part of the abdomen, indicating a congestion in some of the abdominal vessels; The respiration was frequently hurried and uneasy.



The tongue at this stage puts on a yellow or brown incrustation and the alvine evacuations are of a very green or dark appearance — The bile sometimes is also frequently of a green or indigo colour, and sometimes presenting a very dark appearance, approaching to what is called the black vomit by writers. The skin is frequently of a yellow colour. —

The account given furnishes a general outline of the symptoms, which however uniform in their general character are distinguished by different grades of violence and of danger. In some instances the symptoms of congestion and prostration are slight and easily subdued, in other instances, so rapid are their increase



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that the patient although apparently labouring under little disease, at their first accession, would in the course of two or three hours, sometimes be found in articulo mortis.

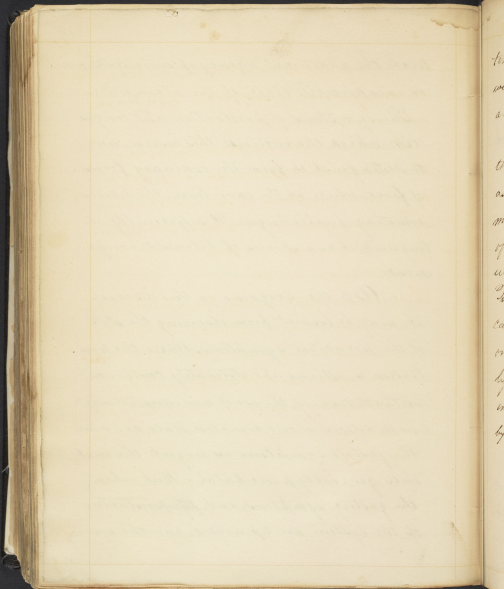
As to the causes of the disease there is room for some diversity of opinion and speculation. It cannot be ascribed solely to the usual causes of bilious fevers such as miasmata from marshy situations &c. For during the existence of the same local causes, with very little variation for a number of years preceding the commencement of this complaint, only the common bilious affections prevailed. We are therefore under the necessity of referring to some other cause, and as the more probable, we should now

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fact the additional agency of some unknown or inexplicable state of the atmosphere.

The symptoms of prostration and congestion, which characterise this disease, serve to distinguish it from the ordinary forms of fever, while at the same time, the bilious vomiting, furred tongue, &c. sufficiently distinguish it as a species of bilious derangement.

As to the prognosis in this disease, it may be formed from observing the state of the principal symptoms. Where the prostration is extreme and obstinately continues, notwithstanding the use of remedies, attended with delirium or a comatose state and where the gastric symptoms are urgent, the event will generally prove fatal. But when the gastric symptoms, and ~~the~~ prostration of the system are less urgent, and the sys-

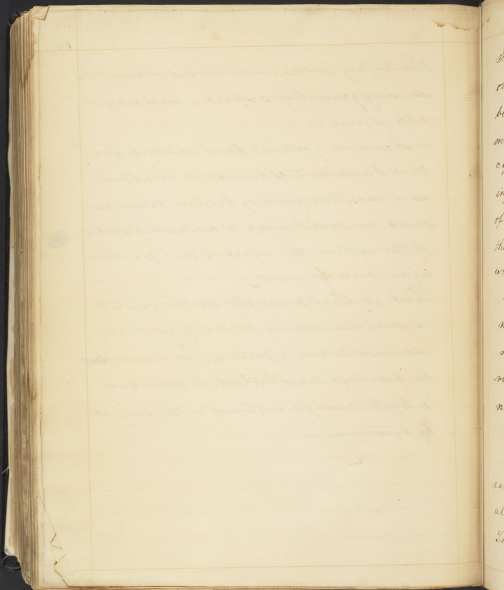




tem kindly reacts under the use of remedies we may generally suspect a manageable disease.

It may be gathered from has been said, that I consider this disease in question as a peculiar form of bilious derangement, connected with a congestive state of the system, the effect of this particular derangement.

But in what precisely, the proximate cause of this disease differs from that in ordinary bilious affections, we cannot clearly decide, no light hitherto, as far as I am informed, having been thrown on the subject by dissections. —



In the treatment of this disease as we before observed, very different modes of practice have been pursued by practitioners. But the most rational and by far the most successful is that deducible from two leading indications, to wit, first the removal of the bilious symptoms present, and secondly, the production of a reaction in the system with a view of relieving the congestion. —

Besides the leading indications above mentioned, there are commonly other accidental and minor circumstances requiring particular attention, which will be noticed hereafter. —

To accomplish the first indication, or to remove the urgent bilious symptoms, mercurial purgatives were chiefly confided in. The sub-muriate of mercury was accord

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ingly given in divided doses, or in the quantity of three or four grains every two or three hours so as to produce a gradual though ~~effectual~~ operation, assisting the medicine after the exhibition of several doses (the quantity to be regulated by the strength of the patient and the violence of the symptoms) by some gentle purgative, such as the Solum Piccini, together with Elix. mata.

When a complete, though gradual operation was procured in this way, the pulse though weak at first, became stronger, reaction of the system took place, and the more urgent symptoms were relieved - It was then necessary to continue the mercurial purgations in the same way, only in a smaller quantity, until the bilious evacuations, aff.

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sumed a more natural appearance  
~~where~~ the urgent symptoms were much  
 relieved. — After which the well regu-  
 lated use of milder purgatives, such  
 as the sulphate of Magnesia alone or  
 in combination with Senna, were suf-  
 ficient, ~~hence~~ the cure was accomplished.

In some very violent cases it was found  
 essential to urge the use of the mercury  
 to the extent of a moderate salivation.  
 Where the system was very much pro-  
 tracted, it was common to combine two or  
 three grains of camphor, with each  
 dose of Calomel.

Some practitioners adopting the views  
 of Dr. Cartwright and others in relation to the  
 Modus operandi of mercury, have given  
 Calomel in doses of twelve or fifteen grains  
 in combination with small portions of





opium, three or four times in the course of the twenty four hours, and with the most flattering results, as they report. I have myself seen the most beneficial effects, result from the use of a combination of Calomel and Dover's powder. —

With a view of answering the second indication or that of bringing about a reaction of the system and relieving the congestion, in addition to the remedies already enumerated, which had a considerable effect in that way, as already observed, other auxiliary remedies were sometimes indispensably necessary. The more prominent resources for this purpose, consisted in the application of blisters to different parts of the body more particularly to the chest and sides, sinapisms to the extremities, stimula



ting embrocations &c. The warm bath and the application of hot bricks to the body have been reported to be beneficial.

As to venesection, however, beneficial it may have been in ordinary bilious cases, when there was a full, open, strong pulse, yet in the disease under consideration, so prostrated were the energies of the system, that it was entirely inadmissible.

The remedy has been advocated by some, on the principle, that its use gradually unloads the system as it were, producing a revolution and in that way relieving the congestive symptoms. Although the theory in regard to its modus operandi may be specious and the practice in particular, in proper states of the system might answer, if directed with caution and discrimination, yet as a gener-



- al rule, I am confident, from an attentive observation of the symptoms and the effect of remedies that the practice would prove highly detrimental.

The observations just made in relation to venesection, do not apply equally to topical bloodletting, though few practitioners have ventured <sup>even</sup> to abstract blood in this way. I have no doubt but that the abstraction of blood from the back of the neck or temples, by cups or leeches, (the quantity to be determined by the effect produced) would have a fine effect in obviating or removing the determination to the head and in relieving the pain and delirium consequent thereon. In the same way the topical abstraction of blood from the chest and hypochondriac regions would relieve the pain and congestion of the sub



facient organs and should always be had recourse to, in severe cases, previously to the application of blisters to those parts.

As to the use of Emetics, the observations just made in relation to the impropriety or rather impracticability of general bloodletting are equally applicable. Their known effect is to relax the system, and to produce at any rate, considerable temporary languor, a situation which illly accords with the already enfeebled powers of nature. —

By some practitioners, of respectability too, Stimulants were principally resorted to, but it would seem that in this particular case, they had suffered their fears (excited by the alarming nature of the symptoms in some cases) to blind their judgments and from having formed incorrect opinions as to the nature of the disease, consequently





deduced an incorrect practice. To answer the purpose of stimulating, today, was given by some to the amount of several quarts in the course of the twenty-four hours, along with a variety of other stimulants and tonics, in the same space of time to a considerable amount, such as ether, camphor, bark &c. This practice in my opinion was only calculated to add fuel to the fire, and so far from relieving the debility, tended only to increase the restlessness and anxiety of the patient, and further prostrate the energies of the system.

It moreover involved a gross departure from principles established ever since the time of the illustrious Sydenham, who expunged from the science, an augram map of error and incongruity, and placed it on a basis, at once, rational, highly liberal, and well

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treated. — The advocates of the practice relate instances where the patients recovered under unpromising circumstances, after the use of those remedies. Admitting the fact, it does not prove that the remedies effected the cure. The maxim *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* when applied in medicine is sometimes perfectly deceptive and fallacious.

The recovery of patients therefore under certain modes of treatment, should in our opinion, be attributed, not to the remedies employed, but to the recuperative efforts of nature alone, which accomplish<sup>ed</sup> the cure. —

I mentioned that besides the leading indications, there were generally other accidental minor symptoms, requiring particular attention — these were an excessive nausea or bilious vomiting, and a repetition of the



chills, the accession of which was not unfrequently, associated with alarming symptoms.

To relieve the nausea or bilious vomiting, the use of the usual <sup>anti-emetic</sup> medicines were resorted to, such as equal parts of lime water and new milk - opium pill, and particularly the application of a blister to the region of the stomach.

In the event of a repetition of the chills after first clearing the stomach, when there was a fair remission, approximating to an intermission, the sulphate of quinine acted like a charm in checking the chill and arresting the further progress of the disease.

It may be remarked, in conclusion, that when the proper remedies had been successfully employed, that convalescence



was uncommonly rapid in this disease.

